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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 007345

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [PINS](#) [PROP](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: SONDHI'S TENTH AND LARGEST RALLY TO DATE ATTRACTS 50,000

REF: A. A: BANGKOK 7317

[1](#)B. B: BANGKOK 7253

[1](#)C. C: BANGKOK 7197

Classified By: Political Counselor Susan M. Sutton for Reasons 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Government critic Sondhi Limthongkul hosted his tenth "mobile talk show" from a monastery in Udon Thani. A crowd of approximately 50,000 gathered in Bangkok's Lumpini Park to listen to Sondhi offer revelations of new scandals concerning the Thai Rak Thai government. In the two-hour program, Sondhi alleged that shadowy "powers that be" had threatened his life. He also criticized the 2004 decision to appoint an "acting Supreme Patriarch" and offered a scathing rebuttal to Deputy Transport Minister Phumtham's accusations of disloyalty. He also slammed the RTG for trying to cover up the scandal involving PM Thaksin's younger sister Montathip and the C-130. Sondhi ended the rally with a call for 500,000 people to attend his next show on December 9 to "show the government that it no longer has legitimacy to run this country". Barring any unforeseen developments, it appears unlikely that they could possibly attract an audience that size. END SUMMARY.

NEW SCANDALS TARGET THAI FIRST LADY; DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER A "SHAMEFUL LIAR"

[1](#)2. (U) With Bangkok still abuzz with last week's scandalous revelations and passionate appeals for the general public to "fight for the King", Sondhi Limthongkul's "mobile talk show" in Bangkok's Lumpini Park has emerged as the place to be on Friday evenings. Political activists have been joined by curious onlookers, picnicking families and entrepreneurs selling unofficial paraphernalia. While the majority of people were clearly interested in hearing what Sondhi had to say, many in the crowd were clearly there to be entertained. Poloff remarked more "coming and going" compared to the previous week's show and many people left before the end. Better weather helped the rally achieve its largest numbers yet- Thai Police estimated that 50,000 people showed up. Sondhi's "Manager" newspaper reported a hopelessly exaggerated figure of 150,000, with a 150,000 more listening to the speech via the web. The speech is also broadcast via 92.25 radio and a number of satellite cable TV stations. Police presence was beefed up considerably, and some in the audience were subject to seemingly random searches. As with previous events, the rally went on peacefully and without incident.

[1](#)3. (U) Sondhi himself did not attend the rally. Instead, he and his co-host Sarocha Pornudomsak did the show via satellite from the monastery of controversial monk Luangta Maha Bua in Udon Thani Province. The monk had invited Sondhi and PM Thaksin to a meeting at his monastery the previous day, although the PM declined citing other engagements. Sondhi's first scandal of the night consisted of allegations that the "powers-that-be", led by an unnamed "Master Lady", were seeking to silence him through threats of imprisonment, intimidation, harassment and unspecified attempts on his life. The "Master Lady" is widely suspected to be a reference to the Thai First Lady, Khunying Potjaman Shinawatra, who is widely known to be an influential adviser and confidante to her husband, PM Thaksin. Sondhi alleged that the "Master Lady" had verbally given the order to the 3rd Region Provincial Police Command to file lese majeste charges against him and his co-host. (Reftel A) Sondhi also alleged that police authorities in several Northeastern provinces had been ordered by Regional Commander (and former classmate of Thaksin) to file libel suits against him for publicly discussing the monarchy.

[1](#)4. (U) Sondhi called Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Kruangam a "shameful liar" for his move in January 2004 to appoint Somdet Phra Phuthajarn as acting Supreme Patriarch (more or less the "Pope" of Thai Buddhism). (Reftel C) Wissanu had stated that the incumbent Supreme Patriarch was ill and only able to work occasionally. Sondhi showed a video of the incumbent Supreme Patriarch, supposedly taken the day he was replaced, looking perfectly active and healthy. (NOTE: One of Thaksin's lawsuits against Sondhi involves the publication of a sermon by Luangta Maha Bua which touches on the controversy. END NOTE) Sondhi alleged that the real reason for the appointment was an attempt by Thaksin to put supporters in high-level positions, including the sacred

Buddhist clergy.

15. (U) Sondhi also hit back at Deputy Transport Minister Phumtham Wechayachai, who had publicly made allegations that Sondhi's rallies were "practice" for a future coup d'etat. (Reftel A) Sondhi made a number of stinging accusations revolving around Phumtham's past activities as a member of the Communist Party in the 1970s, saying "(Phumtham) is so arrogant to think he can teach me about democracy, and can accuse me of dragging down the Monarchy for my own selfish purposes. I dare you to explain why you joined the Communist Party of Thailand if you really have any respect for the Monarchy." He also made references to Thai Rak Thai being committed only to a "4-second democracy" in which they buy votes in order to win democratic elections, and then rule essentially undemocratically.

UPDATING OLD SCANDALS

16. (U) Sondhi also offered new information on the two big scandals from last week. In response to charges that Thaksin's younger sister had used a Thai Army aircraft to fly her and her guests to a housewarming party (Reftel B), the RTG responded that the party had been allowed to tag along on an aircraft which was doing a routine mail run. At Friday's rally, Sondhi dismissed this as a cover-up noting that the only regular mail flights scheduled for that day were going to Udon Thani, not Chiang Mai. Sondhi also charged that the party had been flown to Chiang Mai on a plane with VIP seats, which were not available on planes doing routine mail flights. Sondhi also repeated charges made by an opposition MP earlier this year which question whether Thaksin had used state aircraft to fly home to Chiang Mai to celebrate Thai New Year with his family. Sondhi challenged Thaksin to release travel logs of Thai Koo Fah, the Thai equivalent of Air Force One.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS TOO HIGH? SONDHI ASKS FOR 500,000 TO SHOW UP AT NEXT RALLY

17. (C) Sondhi ended his show with an appeal to the Thai people to "show the government that it no longer has legitimacy to run this country" by having 500,000 people attend his December 9 rally. (NOTE: Sondhi announced that he is taking December 2 off in honor of the King's birthday. END NOTE) One English-language newspaper is claiming the December 9 rally will be a "final showdown" between the PM and the pundit. This is a dangerous gamble for the opposition. If they can turn out 500,000 people, it would shake the government and have major repercussions for Thaksin. Barring some extraordinary new factor between now and then, we don't think they can do it.
BOYCE